DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 945 FL 014 702

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TITLE Christ Respects No Man's Person: The Plain Language of the Early Quakers and the Rhetoric of Impoliteness. Sociolinguistic Working Paper Number 88.
INSTITUTION Southwest Educational Development Lab., Austin, Tex.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Nov 81
NOTE 29p.; For other titles in this series, see FL 014 699-705 and FL 014 707.
AVAILABLE FROM Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 East 7th St., Austin, TX 78701.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Conformity; *Interpersonal Communication; Language Role; *Language Styles; *Language Usage; *Religious Cultural Groups; *Social Behavior; Sociolinguistics
IDENTIFIERS *Politeness; *Quakers

ABSTRACT

Because speaking was a major symbolic focus of 17th century Quakerism, a movement of radical puritanism, and distinctive ways of speaking represented the principal visible means by which the Quakers differentiated themselves from others, much of the religious and political conflict surrounding Quakerism implicated speaking in some way. One aspect of their speech that challenged the core of social relations and interaction was the Quaker refusal to use politeness phenomena: greetings, leavetakings, salutations, titles, and honorific pronouns. The Quakers actively criticized the practice of customary manners, feeling that such utterances were not literally true and that they represented earthly pride. It is not clear what address forms they actually did employ except that they did call both Quakers and non-Quakers "friend" and that the handshake became a customary gesture of leavetaking in some situations. The reason for the Quaker rejection of "you" in the second person singular is the subject of much speculation focusing primarily on two principles: grammaticality and the rejection of forms of deference. The "plain style" of speaking characterized by these elements was the subject of much public debate, the thrust of some of which was to try to decrease the validity of plain talk by trivializing it. The Quaker response was that if the plain style did not deserve so much attention, why did the non-Quakers oppose it so vehemently? The fact is that it did become a rallying symbol for both Quakers and non-Quakers during this peak period of the Quakers' missionary zeal. (MSE)

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Sociolinguistic Working Paper
NUMBER 88

November, 1981
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 East Seventh Street
Austin, Texas

CHRIST RESPECTS NO MAN'S PERSON: THE PLAIN LANGUAGE OF THE EARLY QUAKERS AND THE RHETORIC OF IMPOLITENESS*

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The early Quakers of the seventeenth century, like all the radical puritans of their day, defined themselves in opposition to established institutional religion. Inasmuch as the dominant political issues of the day centered around religion, to be in opposition to prevailing religious practice was also to challenge dominant political and legal structures. Because speaking was a major symbolic focus of early Quakerism, and distinctive ways of speaking represented the principal visible means by which the Quakers differentiated themselves from others, much of the religious and political conflict surrounding Quakerism implicated speaking in some way. Thus, for example, Quakers were beaten for speaking out against the legitimacy of parish priests in their own churches, or jailed for refusing to swear legal oaths or oaths of allegiance, all actions motivated by religious convictions concerning the place of speaking in the godly life.

Of those Quaker speech usages that elicited hostile and violent reactions, however, there was one class, no less religiously motivated, that did not so much challenge religious or political institutions as the very fabric of social relations and social interaction. The forms in question were those that sociolinguists have come to call politeness phenomena: greetings and salutations, titles and honorific pronouns. At issue was the Quakers' refusal to use them.

The doctrinal discussions, religious challenges and debates, legal proceedings, and the like in which the early Quakers engaged with non-Quakers were intense, public events, framed as confrontations on religious grounds. They were dramatic, heightened, invested with importance, but not part of the routine of daily life, even during the most intense periods of Quaker proselytizing, as in London in 1654, or

or Bristol in 1655. Moreover, central participation in such events was limited to a relatively small group of people, those moved to undertake the propagation and defense of Quakerism out in the world. The distinctive Quaker usages in regard to politeness phenomena, however, were part and parcel of the conduct of everyday life, figuring even in secular interactions, and they implicated all Quakers without exception. By constantly violating norms of deference and politeness especially in regard to greetings and leavetakings, titles, and pronouns, Quakers aroused hostilities stronger than any of the other radical puritan groups of the period. This paper is an examination of the nature of the Quaker "plain speech," its ideological underpinnings, and the consequences of its practice.

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One Quaker usage that constituted a particular affront to those with whom they came into contact was their practice with regard to greetings and leavetakings, such as "good morning," "good evening," "good day," "good morrow," "god speed you," "farewell." The Quakers' refusal to use these forms was seen, not surprisingly, as marking a serious lack of civil courtesy. An early anti-Quaker commentator remarked that when the Quakers meet someone by the way, "they will go or ride by them as though they were dumb, or as though they were beasts rather than men, not affording a salutation, or resaluting though themselves saluted" (Higginson 1653:28). Again, this time underscoring the Quakers' lack of manners with regard to leavetaking, "they use no civil salutes, so that their departures and going aside to ease themselves are almost indistinguishable" (Higginson 1653:28). Greetings and salutations are part of the social duty of fully socialized people; to fail to use them is the mark of someone not fully human, either lacking the ability to speak at all, or a beast. They are also ceremonial acts (Goffman 1967:54), conventionalized means of communication by which an individual expresses his own character and conveys his appreciation of the other participants in the situation. To refuse to greet someone, especially someone who has offered a greeting first, is not only to mark oneself as unsocialized, but to signal a lack of social regard for the other person, a serious face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1978) in a society and a period in

which much emphasis was placed on elaborate etiquette (Wildeblood and Brinson 1965:177). I will develop this theme further as our discussion develops. For now we must ask what were the Quakers' grounds for refusing to perform these fundamental courtesies.

When challenged for their refusal to observe the etiquette of greeting, the Quakers' basic appeal was to the demands of Truth, both in its literal sense and as the term was used by the Quakers to designate the proper, godly, spiritual way of the Quaker faith. To live in the way of Truth was to do the work of God and thus to do good. Not to do so was by definition to be out of the good life, whether by omission--not witnessing the Light of God within--or by commission--"evil workers, cursed speakers, drunkards, and cheaters, cozeners, them that use false weights and deceitful measures in their merchandizing in their common occasions and works" (Fox 1657:1).

As I have developed in previous papers (Bauman 1970, 1974), the early Quakers were distrustful of speaking, as a fleshly faculty. One consequence of this distrust was the impulse to limit worldly speaking as far as possible, and thereby to reduce one's susceptibility to being corrupted; hence the frequent injunction to "let your words be few." A principal function of greetings, however, is to open access to talk (Goody 1972:40). It follows naturally, then, that if one has no real need to talk to another person, greetings are to that extent rendered unnecessary and become an entrance to the trap of sinful "idle words." As articulated by Caton, "when [Quakers] have occasion to speak to any man, they speak unto him whether it be on the way, or in the street, or upon the market, or in any other convenient place; but to salute men in a complimentary way, by doffing their hats unto them, and bowing before them, and giving them flattering titles...that they are not free to do" (Caton 1671:27).

Another manifestation of the Quaker demand for truthfulness in all things was a resort to extreme literalness, that is, a refusal to accept any verbal usage, no matter how conventional or no matter how strongly sanctioned by the canons of etiquette, if it violated the standard of truth at any level. Indeed, the Quakers viewed custom and the use of what they saw as empty ceremonial forms as fundamentally incompatible with spiritual rigor. Thus, if they identified a particular kind of

customary behavior as contrary to the truth, it was to be shunned as a lie. To wish someone a good day when he was in an evil day, because he was not in the Light, was both to speak a lie and to partake of his evil deeds oneself. To say "god speed" to him was to invoke the blessing of God on his evil; to wish him farewell was to wish his evil well (Howgill 1676:228; Fox 1657:1-2). "Now we which be in the Light," wrote Fox, "and know the day, who witness the Father and the Son, and to such as are here we can say God speed, and not be partakers of their evil deeds ...but to say the evil day is a good day, is to speak a lie" (Fox 1657: 1-2).

Students of greeting behavior emphasize its essentially phatic function, its lack of literal referential meaning (Ferguson 1976:147), but the seventeenth century Quakers were not willing to make this concession. If the surface-level referential meaning of an expression could be construed as a lie, no element of conventional or functional meaning could render it acceptable. Moreover, mere phatic use of greetings may lead one to use them insincerely or hypocritically, also a lie (Furly 1663: 11-12; Fox 1657:9, 14). Customariness is of no consideration, if by observing custom one violates one's duty to God. Nor is the fact that flying in the face of civil politeness one might offend others--pleasing men is not what one is here for, but rather, obeying God (Caton 1671:28; Howgill 1676:353).

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A similar principle was invoked in regard to another set of politeness forms as well, namely, honorific or deferential titles of address, like "your grace," "my lord," "master," "your excellency," or self-referential salutations, such as "your humble servant," "your most obedient servant," and the actions that accompanied them, including bowing and scraping and putting off one's hat by men, and curtsies by women. Again, it is worth repeating that this was a period in which "the rules of etiquette...attained a zenith of artificial complexity" (Wilde-blood and Brinson 1965:177). For Quakers of the lowest classes, the niceties of such social graces were of somewhat lesser moment, but among the early Friends were people of the yeoman or middle classes (Vann 1969) where the cultivation of good manners was expected, and others, like

Thomas Ellwood, or the Peningtons, or the Penns, were from the upper classes, in which the arts of good manners were assiduously cultivated and good performance of the social graces was constantly subject to evaluation. Ellwood, for example, looking back at the period before he became a Quaker (in 1659), says that the giving of gracious titles "was an evil I had been much addicted to, and was accounted a ready artist in" (Ellwood 1906:25).

Quakers, however, were biting in their characterization of such customs, the

> artificial, feigned, and strained art of compliment, consisting in bundles of fopperies, fond ceremonies, foolish windings, turnings, crouchings and cringings with their bodies, uncovering their heads, using multitudes of frothy, frivolous, light, vain, yea, and most commonly lying words ...by which all honour, respect, reverence, esteem or love must be measured, being so enamoured upon it, that they deem it their glory and crown, to be exact in it (Furly 1663:7; cf. Howgill 1676:353).

At one level, the Quakers rejected such forms because, like the customary greetings, they were not literally true, that is, they did not describe the true relationship between the interlocutors. To call someone "your grace," when he was not in a state of grace, or "master," when he was not your master, or to greet someone with "your humble servant, sir," when you are not his servant, was to lie, and this the Quakers would not do (Ellwood 1906:25; R. Barclay 1831, vol. 2:519). Again, custom, or fear of giving offense were of no consequence here. George Fox records in his journal a dramatic encounter between himself and a Major Ceely, the keeper of the prison at Launceston Castle when Fox was a prisoner there in 1656. While walking on the castle green, Fox encountered the Major, who doffed his hat to him and said, "How do you, Mr. Fox? Your servant, Sir," to which Fox replied, "Major Ceely, take heed of hypocrisy and a rotten heart, for when came I to be thy master and thee my servant? Do servants use to cast their masters into prison?" (Fox 1952:250). The truth must be affirmed, even at a risk to one's personal welfare.

Unwillingness to lie, however, was only one reason for rejecting honorific and deferential titles; at least as important was another set of grounds, which struck closer to the essence of the custom itself. Titles, and the accompanying deferential acts of bowing, taking off the

hat, or curtseying, represented forms of worldly honor, honor of men's persons and gestures of deference to their fleshly pride. The way to salvation, the Quakers held, was not to glorify the earthly self, but to suppress it that the spirit might prevail; "Christ respects no man's person" (Fox 1831, vol. 7:318-319).

It is not clear what address forms and gestures the Quakers employed to open and close encounters in place of the "fond ceremonies" they rejected. They did use "friend" as a term of address, apparently to non-Quakers as well as amongst themselves, anticipating the solidary "comrade" of the revolutionary socialists, although "Friends" was current as a label for separatist groups as early as 1646 (Barbour 1964:30). As regards gestural forms in secular interaction, still less information is available. Furly (1663:13) recommends "giving the hand, falling on the neck, embracing, kissing...[as] more infallible demonstrations of true honour, than those dirty customs" of bowing, curtseying, and doffing the hat, and the handshake did become the customary gesture of leavetaking at the close of a Quaker meeting. It is far from clear, however, how widespread these forms were among Friends, while it seems safe to assume that they were unlikely to be used with non-Quakers.

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The best known of the Quaker speech testimonies was that which rejected the use of "you" in the second person singular, insisting instead upon "thou" and "thee." The most superficial justification for this usage, though inherently accurate and logical, was that the use of "you" to designate the singular was simply ungrammatical, and in this sense not true: "I is a particular, Thee is a particular, Thou is a particular, single, pure proper unto one. We is many, Ye is many, They is many, and You more than one" (Farnsworth 1655:6).

The argument was advanced in a number of tracts, A Battle-Door for Teachers and Professors to learn the Singular and Plural, etc. (Fox, Stubbs, Furly 1660), chief among them. The burden of the argument in this famous work, as in other tracts that focused on the issue of grammaticality, consisted in the main of evidence from other languages, often quite extensive and involved, to support the contention that the singular and plural forms should be distinguished. It is interesting

that the Quakers should have devoted so much energy to the justification of their pronominal usage by appeal to other languages and resorted to that line of reasoning so persistently, since it was not inherently a strong argument. First, it disregarded completely the formal and honorific use of the second person plural form for the singular in the other languages they cited in support of their case, including French, Spanish, German, etc. Nor did the Quaker polemicists deal with the relativistic counterargument raised by critics of their usage, namely, that

> though all the world, save England should use to say, thou to a single person, yet is that no Law to us, nor is our phrase and custom to be judged hereby....There is no one nation or language that can claim authority over another and judge them for forms and phrases of speech, much less over all nations and languages (Cheyney 1676:3).

The force of the Quaker argument on the basis of grammar was even undermined by the Quakers themselves. In his preface to the Battle-Door, which was the most extensive and ambitious statement of the grammatical argument by appeal to other languages, Fox makes one of his strongest statements concerning the earthly nature of languages and their ultimate irrelevance to the establishment of spiritual truth: "All languages are to me no more than dust, who was before languages were, and am owned before languages were and am redeemed out of languages into the power where men shall agree" (Fox, Stubbs, Furly 1660:ii). If all earthly languages are no more than dust, one might ask, why argue in linguistic terms?

But the Quakers were interested in more than linguistic purity for its own sake; their arguments in defense of their pronominal usage ran deeper than mere grammar. Certainly a more important factor in their own eyes was the evidence of the Bible. According to their reading of the Scriptures, the equivalents of "thou" and "thee" were employed by Christ and the primitive Christians as well as in parts of the Old Testament (Clark 1656:21-28; Caton 1671:26). In this light the generalization of "you" was a later corruption, attributed to Popes and Emperors imitating the heathens' homage to their gods (Ellwood 1676:28; Penn 1865: 137), and thus to be done away with together with the rest of the empty customs of the world. Once again, it mattered not at all that "you" had

become customary as a singular form (as argued, e.g., by Cheyney 1672:2; E. Fowler 1676:17-18); one's duty was to be faithful to Truth, not custom (Ellwood 1676:29).

Most important, however, as with titles and hat honor, was that the form employed to designate the second person singular was intimately bound up with questions of social rank and etiquette. The use of "you" to a single individual communicated deference, honor, courtesy, while "thou" imparted intimacy or condescension when used to a close equal or subordinate, but contempt when addressed to a more distant equal or a superior--either that or boorishness. According to a contemporary commentator on accepted patterns of usage,

> We maintain that "thou" from superiors to inferiors is proper, as a sign of command; from equals to equals is passable as a note of familiarity; but from inferiors to superiors, if proceeding from ignorance, hath a smack of clownishness; if from affectation, a tone of contempt (Hill 1975:247; see also Cheyney 1676:5).

Thus, by refusing to use "you" to a single individual because it represented a form of worldly honor, and using "thou" instead, the Quakers provoked the hostility of others, who took their behavior as a sign of contempt (see Brown and Gilman 1960:274-276 on the "thou" of contempt). Besides being grammatically untrue, then, the use of "you" in the singular constituted a form of worldly honor, which was rendered all the more odious by the circumstance that those who insisted on the use of the honorific "you" to themselves addressed God, to whom honor was truly due, as "thou" in their prayers (Farnsworth 1655:2).

From this vantage point, then, the use of "thou" to a single person became a means of attacking the fleshly pride that demanded honor and deference. "That which cannot bear thee and thou to a single person, what sort soever, is exalted proud flesh, and is accursed with a curse, and cast out from God" (Farnsworth 1655:6; see also Farnsworth 1653:29). The honorific form was deliberately rejected to exert a humbling effect upon the person addressed, a reminder of the vanity of worldly honor. Fox expresses the principle clearly: "This 'thou' and 'thee' was a fearful cut to proud flesh and self-honour" (Fox 1952:416).

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Taking up the usages that constituted the plain style was not without its difficulties for the first generation of Quakers. It was not simply a matter of subscribing to a principle and then making one's speaking conformable to it, but rather the learning of an entirely new set of speech habits which ran counter in many fundamental respects to common and polite usage. This was no easy matter, when one considers that the first generation of Quakers were all adults (Howard 1704:24-25). Indeed, John Gratton compared the experience to being a child again: "I was to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as a little child, and was to learn anew to speak and walk" (Gratton 1720:44). Coming forth in the plain style was especially problematic for the minority of Quakers like Thomas Ellwood and William Penn who came from those levels of society which placed a high value on the cultivation of polished manners, and where elaborate politeness was counted a necessary social grace (Ellwood 1906:25-26; Penn 1865:108-109).

The adoption of the Quaker practices with regard to greetings, titles, and pronouns was rendered still more difficult by the strong reactions, ranging from surprise to violent hostility, that the unconventional Quaker usages provoked on the part of others. In the very early years, before Quakerism had spread very far and people had become more familiar with the Quakers' peculiar ways, the reaction of outsiders was often simply one of surprise. Fox records an instance in 1651 when he stopped at a house on his travels northward and asked the woman of the house for something to eat, employing "thee" and "thou" to her. She was, he notes, "something strange" in her reaction to his speech (Fox 1952:77). Some observers, when they first encountered the unconventional Quaker style, found it so strange that they could only conclude that the Quakers were deranged. Of an incident in which he was brought before a justice in 1652 for disturbing a church service, Fox wrote,

> he bad me put off my hat, and I took it off in my hand, and said to him, "Doth this trouble thee?" And I put it on again; and I said "thou" to him, and he asked the man that rid thither before me whether I was not mazed or fond. And he said, no, it was my principle (Fox 1952:92).

These reactions, however, were comparatively mild. From the very beginning, the plain speech of the Quakers provoked angry and violent

reactions from those who saw it as rudeness and felt themselves offended by it (Edmondson 1820:50; Fox 1952:406). Some years later, looking back on that early period, Fox recalled that Friends were "in danger many times of our lives, and often beaten, for using those words to some proud men, who would say, 'Thou'st "thou" me, thou ill-bred clown,' as though their breeding lay in saying 'you' to a singular" (Fox 1952:416).

Nor was it only the hostility and scorn of strangers that one risked by adopting the plain speech. More painful by far was the alienation from those with whom one had a close relationship, such as parents or employers, that resulted from the use of the offensive familiar pronoun or failure to use the proper honorific form. In Richard Davies' case, for example, his master was not offended by his use of "thee" and "thou,"

> but when I gave it to my mistress, she took a stick and gave me such a blow upon my bare head, that made it swell and sore for a considerable time; she was so disturbed at it, that she swore she would kill me; though she would be hanged for me; the enemy so possessed her, that she was quite out of order; though beforetime she seldom, if ever, gave me an angry word (Davies 1832:29).

Not only did Davies' use of the familiar pronoun provoke his formerly loving mistress to violence, but his unwillingness to use the worldly forms of honor estranged him from his father as well (Davies 1832:33).

Perhaps the most dramatic case on record, and the one most often cited, is that of Thomas Ellwood, a member of the gentry, son of a justice, and at one period in his youth amanuensis to John Milton. Ellwood recalls in detail the beatings, tirades, and other punishments he endured at his father's hands for the use of "thou" and "thee" to him and his refusal to remove his hat in his father's presence (Ellwood 1906:27-54).

Although the hostility and violence visited upon them for their use of the plain speech imposed an often severe burden upon the early Quakers, the suffering that they experienced thereby also had a strongly reinforcing effect on individual faith and group solidarity. The Christian doctrine of salvation through suffering--no cross, no crown--the suppression of the earthly self so that the spirit might prevail, was central to Quaker belief and practice. To be subjected to suffering for one's religious convictions represented a kind of spiritual testing, which, if accepted

and endured, helped to validate the spiritual rightness of one's existence. As Penn wrote, "there is a hidden treasure in it," despite the "wonder, scorn, and abuse of the multitude" (Penn 1865:108). Thus, the early Quakers spoke very explicitly of the process of adopting the distinctive and controversial Quaker usages as "taking up the cross" of the plain speech.

For the very earliest Quakers, this process does not seem to have involved a moral struggle. Fox, for example, simply records that when the Lord sent him forth on his religious mission he forbade him from following the honorific and deferential customs of the world and required him to use the plain style (Fox 1952:36). But as others were attracted to Quakerism, and the plain style, like other Quaker practices, became institutionalized, it very soon became a part of the process of convincement to undergo a struggle in taking up the cross of the plain speech, dreading the social consequences, temporizing (Furly 1663:51-52), delaying and postponing the adoption of the proper forms, and feeling intensely guilty about one's failure to do the right thing (Stirredge 1810:60), until the breakthrough was finally achieved. Luke Howard, for example, the first Quaker in Dover, struggled for months over the matter of pronouns, worrying that he would lose his trade, be mocked by drunkards and taunted by fools in the streets, and be unable to remain faithful to the Quaker standard (Howard 1704:23-24). John Gratton, convinced in 1671, makes very clear both the difficulty of sacrificing the good regard of others, and the spiritual satisfaction of taking up the cross of the plain speech, though he suffered for it:

> this language and conversation was hard to flesh and blood, that would have pleased men, and had their praise which I got when I was young, and it went hard with me to lose it all, which I knew I must, though they took offence at me for my obedience to the Lord, so I gave up in obedience to the will of God, in which I found life and peace to my soul, and great encouragement and joy in the Lord, though this way of speaking and carriage went very hard with me, and was a great cross to my natural part, and helped to lay me very low, and to mortify the old man in me, and made me willing to be a fool in the eyes of the world, and to be despised of men (Gratton 1720:44).

Indeed, hesitation and struggle in taking up the cross of plain speech came to be so much the pattern that even non-Quakers saw it as

onventionalized for newly convinced Quakers, suggesting, with how much ustice it is difficult to assess, that a too hasty adoption of Quaker sage would somehow be suspect. In a set of somewhat mocking and sarastic "Directions how to attain to be a Quaker," an anonymous antiuaker pamphleteer wrote in 1669: "Be not too hasty to use thee and thou, s their fashion is, but stay till thou hast gained more acquaintance mongst them, and then thou may'st be the bolder to do it. But after thou as once begun it be sure thou never forget it" (Anon. 1669:8-9).

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As suggested in the foregoing pages, the plain style was the focus of onsiderable public controversy and debate. Numerous pamphlets and tracts ere published by critics of Quaker practice in which a range of objections as raised against the plain speech, and by the Quakers themselves, marhalling counterarguments in its defense. Examination of the terms of he debate is instructive for what it reveals about the ways in which the lain style conditioned the Quakers' place in the larger society, and in hich the Quakers' own belief and practice in regard to speaking were ormulated partially in response to the wider social and cultural environent.

The thrust of one group of arguments against the plain style was to ttempt to impugn its validity by trivializing it, either by suggesting hat the politeness forms were a small matter and that the Quakers were isguided to lay so much store in such trifling issues, or by accusing he Quakers of adopting such deviant usages simply as an identity badge, in affected singularity as a mark of distinction from their neighbours" E. Fowler 1678:59). The Quaker response to this charge that their rincipled insistence upon the plain style made a mountain of a molehill, urned the argument back on their critics: if the Quaker usage was such small matter, why do the non-Quakers oppose it so vehemently? Moreover, othing that is required of men by God is trivial. The case is very otly and concisely stated by William Penn:

> To such as say that we strain at small things...I answer with meekness, truth, and sobriety; first, nothing is small, which God makes matter of conscience to do, or leave undone. Next, inconsiderable as they are made by those who object to our practice, they are so greatly set by, that for our not giving them, we are beaten, imprisoned, refused justice, etc., to say

> nothing of the derision and reproach which have been frequently flung at us on this account. So that if we had wanted a proof of the truth of our inward belief and judgment, the very practice of those who opposed it would have abundantly confirmed us (Penn 1865:107).

Although the suggestion that the plain style was merely "a green ribbon, the badge of the party, to be better known" (Penn 1865:107) was clearly controverted simply by the mass of Quaker expressions of the moral grounds for their practice, whether or not one accepted them as valid, it is certainly true that the plain style served as an identity badge for the Quakers. To begin with, the use of "thee" and "thou" and the avoidance of conventional greetings and titles, together with the sober Quaker demeanor (Symonds 1656:5), were the most visible signs of one's Quaker affiliation. Richard Davies' experience was thus typical: "I was now first called a Quaker," he wrote, "because I said to a single person Thee and Thou, and kept on my hat" (Davies 1832:30). Even further, the adoption of these usages came very early to represent a kind of self-induced rite of passage, marking one's "coming out" as a Quaker.

Once again, Thomas Ellwood's account of his personal experience stands as a dramatic instance of this process, rendered the more so by the fact that as a member of the gentry, he had especially cultivated the elaborate displays of politeness that signalled good breeding and manners in mid-seventeenth century England. Ellwood records vividly the occasion on which, meeting a group of his former acquaintances, he refrained for the first time from participating in their greeting ritual. To their puzzled, "What, Tom! a Quaker!" he answered, "Yes: A Quaker," and was immediately filled with joy "that I had strength and boldness given me to confess my self to be one of that despised people" (Ellwood 1906:32-33).

That the plain style was a rallying symbol for the Quakers is made clear by Penn's exhortation that taking up the cross of the plain style "enlists thee in the company of the blessed, mocked, persecuted Jesus; to fight under his banner, against the world, the flesh, and the devil" (Penn 1865:109). Thus, while the plain style was not consciously adopted as an identity badge, it certainly came by its radical unconventionality to serve that function in the eyes of Quakers and non-Quakers alike.

The second major group of arguments against the plain style has already been alluded to earlier in the discussion, namely, that the politeness forms rejected by the Quakers were sanctioned by custom. Although custom and convention were seen by various anti-Quaker critics as validating the whole range of politeness forms at issue--"usage gives the stamp to speech, and custom is the only law, to make words, or phrases, proper, or improper" (E. Fowler 1676:17)--the argument was employed most fully and frequently to counter Quaker appeals to other languages as grounds for maintaining a distinction between second person singular and plural pronouns, that is, "thou" vs. "you" in the singular. In this vein, one anti-Quaker pamphleteer argued that,

> it is convenient and proper for us in England to say, you, to a single person...because custom hath so fixed it, and custom is the great law in speech....And whatsoever is the common use, backed by tradition, and universally taught by parents to their children, masters to their scholars, and is ordinary in common converse, this is the most authentic law in speech (Cheyney 1676:2; see also E. Fowler 1676:18).

This argument had a certain rhetorical effectiveness in that it countered the Quaker appeal to the precedent of other languages with an appeal to their own national language, meeting the Quakers to a degree on their own terms.

The Quakers, however, had recourse to a further counterargument that was more fundamental than an appeal to mere linguistic appropriateness, namely, morality. It will be recalled that the Quakers' more basic argument against politeness forms was that they fed one's earthly pride, and were thus destructive to true spiritual righteousness. The early Quakers viewed the course of world history from the days of the primitive church to their own period as one of degeneration and decline, through which the pure teachings of Christ and his disciples were overlaid with corrupt, vain, and worldly practices (Burrough 1658:15-16). Their Quaker faith redeemed them out of the corruption, but the rest of England remained mired in sin. It was only to be expected, then, in their view, that custom and tradition would uphold degenerate and sinful forms of social interaction. "And doth not then the upholding that custom uphold pride, and the upholding pride cause religion to suffer?" charged Ellwood, in rebuttal of an anti-Quaker tract criticizing the plain style. The author, he goes on,

> magnifies custom, and builds all upon it; but I impeach that custom itself, as nourishing and cherishing that in man which is not of the Heavenly Father's planting, and therefore must be plucked up. Let the ax therefore be laid to the root of this custom, which is, pride, ambition, haughtiness, flattery; and no further controversy will ever sprout from it (Ellwood 1676:29).

The remedy was clear: proper godly behavior was an eternal standard to be upheld over custom, which was transitory (Caton 1671:28). However strongly conventional the world's politeness forms might be, they ought to be abandoned by everyone in favor of the spiritually appropriate plain style.

If the use of the plain style had struck only at grammaticality or custom, it might still have remained a matter of controversy, because any religiously motivated deviant behavior was a political issue in mid-seventeenth century England, but it would probably not have generated so intense and heated a body of controversy as it did. The real issue, recognized by Quakers and non-Quakers alike was that the plain style challenged the social structure and the structure of social relations in very fundamental ways. It was, at least in its beginnings, a manifestation of radical puritanism at nearly its most radical.

The social interactional impact of the Quakers' refusal to offer greetings or titles, or using "thou" to a person of high status, was to make them appear to be "a rude, unmannerly people, that would not give civil respect or honour to their superiours" (Ellwood 1906:37-38; see also Anon. 1655:14-15). Time and again, one encounters judgments of their behavior couched in such terms as "rude," "unmannerly," "uncivil," "discourteous," "disrespectful," "contemptuous," "arrogant," "disdainful," "churlish," or "clownish," imputing to them either ignorance or flouting of good manners.

It is instructive that the use of the plain style also drew down accusations that the Quakers were supercilious, proud, vainglorious (Anon. 1655:14-15), or self-conceited (Furly 1663:23), because that was certainly a plausible reading of their behavior in terms of the contemporary politeness system; the denial of politeness forms was one clear way of asserting one's superiority to others in social interaction. These charges, of course, validated the Quakers' insistence that it was really

worldly pride that they were attacking through the use of the plain style, not out of pride on their own part, but out of the religious conviction that all flesh must be brought low, so that the spirit might prevail. They were obeying God's command "who forbids us to bow"--literally or figuratively--"to the likeness of anything in Heaven, Earth, or under the Earth" (Fisher 1660:x). For the Quakers, "the ground of all true nobility, gentility, majesty, honour, breeding, manners, courtesy and civility, no more after the flesh, but after the spirit" (Parnel 1675: 92), lay in truth and love in speaking Truth to one's neighbor, in doing unto others as you would have them do unto you (Fox 1831, vol. 4:200; Parnel 1675:91).

To accuse the Quakers of rudeness and lack of manners was to see them as destructive of the proper order of social relations at the level of social interaction. At times, however, the argument was raised to a more general level. That is, by refusing to display the proper respect not only to their peers but to their social superiors, "those that are over us in the flesh" (A.R. Barclay 1841:5), including often magistrates, officers or political officials, they were seen as enemies to the social order and civil authority (Ellwood 1906:37-38). One anti-Quaker critic asserted that the casting off of good manners by the Quakers "doth directly tend to overthrow all government and authority amongst men; for, take away outward honour and respect from superiors, and what government can subsist long amongst men?" (quoted in Bohn 1955:348). In the blunt words of another critic, the Quaker is "a professed enemy to all order" (R.H. 1672:3).

The charges were often expressed in terms of a levelling impulse (e.g., C. Fowler and Ford 1656:41), after the Levellers, who called for equality of property and the elimination of social and political distinctions based upon wealth, and indeed there does seem to have been a significant Leveller influence upon numbers of the early Quakers (Hill 1975:125-128).

The positions taken by Quakers in terms of these issues and in response to the criticisms that were directed at them were various, reflecting as much the background or rhetorical purpose of the individual or historical circumstance as Quaker religious doctrine. In general,

during the first period of Quakerism, through the 1650s, but especially during the period 1654-1656 when Quakerism was at the height of its missionary zeal, their statements were at their most radical, castigating the prevailing system of social and economic inequality and the politeness system that supported it, as founded on earthly lust, pride, and self-will. One of the strongest voices was the young minister and early Quaker martyr, James Parnel:

> And here is the ground of the world's superiority, nobility, gentility, honour, breeding and manners; and here they Lord over one another by their corrupt wills; and here is the ground of all tyranny and oppression, rackings and taxings, and wars, and imprisonments, and envy, and murder, and the persecution of the righteous; all arise from proud Lucifer, the lust in man, who would be honoured; and all this is in the fall, and under the curse (Parnel 1675:86).

In true levelling spirit, Parnel wants to do away with a superiority and nobility of the flesh, and substitute a nobility of the spirit, in which honor is due to the true in spirit, whether "magistrate or minister, fisherman or ploughman, herdsman or shepherd, wheresoever it rules without respect of persons" (Parnel 1675:89-90, see also pages 94-95, and Fox 1831, vol. 4:198).

By the 1660s, however, one can detect a clear tempering of the Quakers' stance on the social implications of the plain style, as their missionary zeal declined, fiery leaders like Parnel died in prison, and much of their effort had to be devoted simply to surviving the massive legal repression visited upon them after the Restoration and to showing that they were not enemies to authority. The statement of Benjamin Furly, for example, in 1663, has a conciliatory and accommodative tone that contrasts sharply with Parnel's radicalism:

> We say, though after outward power, authority, rule, government or dominion we seek not, nor do desire it, yet we despise it not, but do own it in its place; and do submit unto it for peace and conscience sake, as Christ who was above all outward rule also did. The like for titles, as being distinctions of several offices, as names are of diverse persons, we both own and use them; yet titles there are flattering and blasphemous, in which the honour of God is attributed to man whose breath is in his nostrils, and these, we freely confess we own not, and do trample upon that deceitful mind from whence they came (Furly 1663:54).

Although the social origins of the early Quakers have been the subject of some debate (Vann 1969), it is clear that the movement did attract adherents from the gentry and aristocracy, people like the Peningtons, Thomas Ellwood, William Penn, and Robert Barclay. Penn and Barclay, the two major Quaker apologists of the seventeenth century, came to Quakerism after the zeal of the first period was largely spent, and their response to the charges of social radicalism levelled against the Quaker plain style reflects both their own social backgrounds and the historical circumstances of the Restoration period. Penn seems at times to reduce the Quaker plain style to formalist terms, seeing the symbolic inversion represented by Quaker usage largely as a means of enhancing the rhetorical power of the general Quaker mission:

> The world is so set upon the ceremonies part and outside of things, that it has pleased the wisdom of God in all ages, to bring forth his dispensations with very different appearances to their settled customs; thereby contradicting human inventions, and proving the integrity of his confessors. Nay, it is a test upon the world: it tries what patience, kindness, sobriety, and moderation they have (Penn 1865:108).

Violating custom in these terms is simply an efficient means of trying and testing the powers that be; underlying principle is not much in evidence here.

Robert Barclay, in his Apology, contrasts strongly in tone with Parnel, twenty years earlier. In place of Parnel's ringing indictment of fleshly lust, oppression and privilege, we get a calm acceptance of inequality:

> Let not any judge, that from our opinion in these things, any necessity of levelling will follow, or that all men must have things in common. Our principle leaves every man to enjoy that peaceably, which either his own industry, or his parents have purchased to him; only he is thereby instructed to use it aright, both for his own good, and that of his brethren; and all to the glory of God ... we know, that as it hath pleased God to dispense [the creation] diversely, giving to some more, and some less, so they may use it accordingly. The several conditions, under which men are diversely stated, together with their educations answering thereunto, do sufficiently show this (R. Barclay 1831, vol. 2:516).

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The appropriate use of greetings, titles and other honorifics, or formal pronouns is, as I have emphasized, a way of being polite. The

Quakers, of course, refused to use these forms, but systematic violation of politeness conventions is no less important to the study of politeness than their scrupulous observation. Moreover, politeness, or the lack of it, was the principal frame of reference for contemporary discussions of Quaker practice, within the context of the broader social environment in which they acted.

The fullest and most analytically suggestive framework for the sociolinguistic study of politeness phenomena is provided by Brown and Levinson in their seminal article on "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena" (1978). Building upon the work of Goffman, Brown and Levinson conceive of politeness phenomena as means of acknowledging or upholding another person's face, which they see as consisting of two aspects, positive face, "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants " and negative face, "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction--i.e., to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown and Levinson 1978:66). Failure to employ politeness forms and strategies appropriately thus makes for what the authors term face-threatening acts. In the case of the Quaker plain language, it was positive face that was threatened by the Quakers' deviant usages.

The work of Brown and Levinson on politeness, like that of Goffman, is marked by a certain essentially valid eufunctional thrust. Thus Goffman suggests, for example, that "it seems to be a characteristic obligation of many social relationships that each of the members guarantee to support a given face for the other members in given situations" (Goffman 1967:42). Brown and Levinson, while they give serious consideration to impoliteness, building much of their analytical framework on the notion of face-threatening acts, emphasize most strongly the means and strategies for mitigation and redress of these acts. "In general," they maintain, "people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face" (Brown and Levinson 1978:66). And again, "In the context of the mutual vulnerability of face, any rational agent will seek to avoid...face-threatening acts, or will employ certain strategies

to minimize the threat" (Brown and Levinson 1978:73).

Acknowledging the general validity of these observations, what are we to make of the seventeenth century Quakers, who formulated an interactional system built upon the principled contravention of prevailing standards of politeness? At the very least, the Quaker case should be of more than usual comparative and theoretical interest, as a system in which the eufunctional generalizations of Goffman and Brown and Levinson do not hold.

As I have observed earlier in this discussion, seventeenth century English society was characterized by a high degree of preoccupation with deference and politeness. The factors contributing to this preoccupation were various, ranging from the continuing salience of traditional social structures of stratification and hierarchy, to the burgeoning thrust for respectability on the part of the rising middle class, to the influence of elaborate continental systems for the display of deference. The scope of this study does not allow for an extensive or fine-grained analysis of the dynamics of conventional politeness forms during the period under review, but one can certainly say that failures to greet, or to use titles and salutations and formal pronouns were strongly marked in a great many social interactional contexts. That is, they represented face-threatening acts, whether or not they were taken as affronts by those who came into contact with Friends.

To be sure, there were always some people during that period of religious ferment who were tolerant of behavior, however deviant, that was based on sincere religious principle. Such people, like Richard Davies' master, for example (Davies 1832:29), were not threatened by the Quakers' plain language. Moreover, as Barbour points out, there were certain regional differences with regard to pronominal usage; in those parts of the North and West of England (especially in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Westmoreland, Cumberland, Devon, and Somerset) where Quakerism arose and was most strong, "thee" forms appear to have been standard among equals, and are less likely to have caused affront (Barbour 1964:164-165). When Quakers spread to the other parts of England, to the south and east, where "thee" was an insult except to inferiors, their use of this form would naturally provoke strong feelings of hostility. Time was also a

factor in the way the plain language was likely to be perceived by non-Quakers to whom it was addressed. As people in various parts of England became more familiar with Quakers and their behavior, through the 1660s, '70s and '80s, and came to recognize the plain language as conventional, they were increasingly less likely to take the Quakers' apparent "rudeness" personally and be affronted by it.

In addition to the above factors, although direct evidence is scarce, there are indications that the Quakers did employ certain redressive means to mitigate the face-threatening effect of the plain language. The use of "friend" as a solidary term of address, for example, appears to have been a common redressive strategy; by 1672, the phrase, "plainly I tell thee, Friend," was recognized as a formulaic usage of Quakers in trade (R.H. 1672:4; cf. Brown and Levinson 1978:112-113). Thomas Ellwood's detailed account of his troubles with his father over his unwillingness to use the customary politeness forms indicates that he was at pains to continue to manifest his respect for his father in other ways, though to little avail (Ellwood 1906:47). Certainly, the Quakers' own direct statements of their intent emphasize that they meant no insult, arrogance, disdain, or contempt in their use of the plain speech, urging their critics to examine the rest of their behavior for confirmation of this (Fisher 1660:x; Furly 1663:23).

Even when all such allowances are made, however, there remained the constant potential that the plain language would give affront to those who were zealous guardians of their social position and self-esteem. This was especially true in regard to pronouns, as the experience of Richard Davies with his mistress, Thomas Ellwood with his father, and countless other Quakers with priests and magistrates plainly demonstrates. Whatever redressive means the Quakers were willing to employ, there was a point beyond which they would not go if it meant compromising the integrity of the principles of Truth on which the plain language was based. These religious imperatives, implicating their very spiritual salvation, were far more important than worldly comfort or the willingness to uphold others' face.

The Quakers' behavior with regard to conventional politeness forms and strategies had both an expressive and a rhetorical dimension. By

expressive here, I mean to identify factors bearing on the Quakers' understanding of the ways in which what they said affected themselves--what they could and could not say, and why. By rhetorical is meant their understanding of the ways in which what they said affected others.

The principal expressive factors I have identified are three in number: the requirement always to tell the truth, the prohibition against idle words, and the injunction against paying honor to men's persons. The requirement always to tell the truth operated most centrally with regard to greetings, titles, and salutations, and more peripherally with regard to pronouns. Rejecting the notion that politeness forms are merely phatic and conventional, not to be measured by the standard of referential accuracy, Friends insisted that to address someone as "master" who was not in fact one's master, or "your grace," when he was not in a state of grace, or to salute him with "your humble servant" when you are not his servant, is contrary to literal truth, and therefore a lie. Likewise, to wish someone a good day, or farewell, when he was, like all non-Quakers, in a state of spiritual evil, was again to lie. Worse yet, it was to participate in his evil oneself. The argument of truth against using "you" in the singular was more legalistic and less often voiced. A single individual is one, not many; hence, to address him in the plural is again to lie.

The biblical injunction against idle words--"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account of in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12.36-37)--was closely observed by the Quakers, upholding, as I have established, their distrust of speaking. With regard to politeness, the form most directly implicated by the need to avoid idle words was greetings, insofar as one of the primary functions of greetings is to open access to talk. Thus, if one has nothing to engage another person in talk about, no contact need be established. To employ a greeting for its own sake or for the sake of convention is to engage in idle words, at a risk to one's own spiritual welfare.

Finally, insofar as the conventions of politeness were keyed to relative social status--"you" for peers and superiors, "thou" to inferiors,

titles and salutations a means of signaling deference--to use them was to honor another's person in direct contravention of the biblical injunction to the contrary: "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2.9). Indeed, the book of James, chapter 2, goes on to establish the irreducible foundation of the Quakers' principle against moral compromise of any kind: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2.10). If politeness is the tending of another's face, and if that face is grounded in self-esteem based on wordly honor, then to that extent to follow custom is to condemn oneself before God and this the Quakers would not do.

This much establishes why the seventeenth century Friends would not follow the conventions of politeness for the sake of their own spiritual welfare. But, as I have suggested, there was also a powerful rhetorical motivation to the use of the plain language. Not to pay honor to men's persons by using the world's politeness forms and strategies was motivated by a concern for others' spiritual welfare as well. A central part of the Quakers' mission in the world was to help to redeem the rest of mankind out of the worldly corruption into which it had fallen since the days of the primitive church. The use of the plain speech was a powerful weapon in the Lamb's War, attacking the very fleshly pride that was otherwise fed and exalted by the politeness forms the Quakers rejected. Indeed, the plain language was at its most effective when people were offended by it, for that meant that they recognized that their pride was at stake. Under the best of circumstances, this recognition opened the way to a fuller spiritual self-knowledge, by which "many came to see where they were" (Fox 1952:36), and were able, by the grace of the Inward Light, to move from a lust for the world's honor to a higher state, by a suppression of the fleshly pride that fed upon conventional politeness.

For the Quakers, to be instrumental thus in the salvation of others was to carry out the mission assigned them by God. But, as we have seen, far from all of those who were affronted by the plain language were moved thereby to spiritual insight; anger, violence, and persecution were the frequent consequence of the Quakers' "rudeness." What is important, though, is that this too had its benefits, because the suffering visited

upon Friends because of the plain language reinforced their ethic of suffering as a means to spiritual salvation. Bearing the cross of the plain language in a hostile world was a means for the early Quakers to enact and display their faith, shared by the entire Quaker fellowship. Thus, the rhetoric of the plain language served basic Quaker ends both when it succeeded and when it failed. As a people who saw their mission in a corrupt world as one of doing away with the exaltation of the flesh so that the spirit of God might prevail, the early Quakers could scarcely have chose a more effective means than politeness phenomena as a focus for their religious challenge.

Note

*This paper is adapted from a chapter in a book-length study of seventeenth-century Quaker speech, Let Your Words Be Few: The Symbolism of Speaking and Silence Among the Seventeenth Century Quakers.

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